

Wyckoff Township Public Schools
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Dear Parents and Guardians:

To assist parents in understanding the implications of MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus) in the school setting, I am providing information from three resources. At this time, MRSA is starting to appear in surrounding school districts and I want parents to have information available to them so that we can all work together to minimize any impact we may see in the future in our schools.

1. Information provided by the Department of Health Services

County of Bergen, 3227 East Ridgewood Avenue, Paramus, NJ 07652-4895. Telephone: 201-634-2600; Fax: 201-986-1068. www.bergenhealth.org; healthdept@co.bergen.nj.us

There has been extensive coverage in the news recently about a bacterial infection called MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus). MRSA is not a new disease. It has been a public health concern for many years, especially in hospitals and healthcare facilities. In the past several years it has become more frequent in the community. MRSA skin infections are resistant to some antibiotics, but not all and can be successfully treated. Early diagnosis and treatment are especially important.

MRSA skin infections are generally spread through contact with the bacteria, either by direct skin-to-skin contact or indirectly through shared equipment, personal articles/objects, or contaminated surfaces. Examples of shared objects include towels, bar soap, razors, clothing and athletic equipment.

A MRSA skin infection will often look like a pustule, boil, turf burn or spider bite. The area may become red, warm, swollen, painful, or contain pus or other drainage. Treatment by a healthcare provider may include drainage of the wound, a prescription for antibiotics and help in reducing the amount of bacteria on the skin.

There are some key facts you should remember about MRSA:

- MRSA is treatable, but can become serious if untreated
- Be alert to the signs and symptoms of MRSA and seek medical care if you think you may have the infection
- Do not share personal care items
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently
- Cover skin infections with clean bandages and wear clothing that covers the area of infection

2. Information provided by the NJ Department of Health and Senior Services

Due to recent media reports of MRSA cases among school students, the NJ Dept. of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) Infectious and Zoonotic Disease Program (IZDP) is providing the following information.

Is MRSA reportable?

Single cases of MRSA are not reportable. However, if there is a cluster (2 or more non-household cases) of MRSA infections within a school, the local health department should be contacted so it can determine if an outbreak might be occurring.

Should infected students/employees be excluded from school?

Schools should not be closed, and classes should not be canceled. People who are infected are permitted to attend school/work as long as they are compliant with infection control measures. Skin infections should be kept clean and bandaged. Students who participate in contact sports may be excluded from participating if they cannot keep their wound properly bandaged. If there are multiple confirmed cases of MRSA infections among members of a particular sport, and the sport team shares common equipment, that sports team may be closed down temporarily. These recommendations should be made in consultation with the local health department.

Should we notify parents if a student has a MRSA infection?

NJDHSS does not recommend parent notification for isolated cases. However, if a particular school chooses to notify parents, please do so in coordination with your local health department. The local health department will review any letters for technical accuracy and can assist with phone inquiries from concerned parents.

What can schools do to prevent MRSA infections?

- Provide students/parents with information about MRSA and preventive behaviors.
- Encourage frequent hand washing by students and employees.
- Encourage proper personal hygiene among students and employees such as showering after sports activities, wearing clean clothing, etc.
- Discourage the sharing of personal items such as clothing, towels, bar soap, sports equipment, etc.
- Ensure proper environmental cleaning with EPA approved disinfectants.
- Encourage staff and students to keep any wounds bandaged and to consult with their healthcare provider for evaluation of any suspicious skin lesions.

Should any special soap be used for hand washing?

Any kind of soap is fine for hand washing. It does not have to be antibacterial. Frequent hand washing is very important, and the act of washing is more important than the type of soap.

Should special laundry detergent be used?

There is no need for special laundry detergent. Washing clothing in hot water with regular laundry detergent and drying in a hot air drier will kill the bacteria.

Should special disinfectants be used?

There is no need for special disinfectants. Use an EPA-approved product, and follow use instructions carefully.

Does the NJDHSS have any educational materials?

The NJDHSS has a brochure entitled “MRSA: Preventing Skin Infections in School and Athletic Settings.” It is available for download and printing from the NJDHSS website (listed below).

Information regarding MRSA including educational materials and guidelines for school, correctional, and health care settings can be found at the NJDHSS website at <http://nj.gov/health/cd/mrsa/index.shtml>.

3. Information provided by the Wyckoff Board of Health

Basic Information:

MRSA is a bacterial infection (not a virus) surfacing in schools and other settings. MRSA is the abbreviate for Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus. It is primarily a skin infection often resembling a pimple, boil or spider bite at its onset. It quickly worsens into an abscess or pus filled blister or sore and becomes serious when it enters the blood stream. This lesion should not be squeezed or drained as this can spread the infection to other parts of the skin or deeper into the body via the bloodstream.

The vast majority of MRSA infections have historically occurred within hospital settings. However, up to 15% occur in the community among otherwise healthy people. This population includes those who are prone to cuts and scrapes particularly in children and athletes.

How is MRSA communicated?

MRSA spreads by skin to skin contact, crowded conditions and the sharing of personal items.

Who is at risk?

1. Those who have regular contact with patients in hospitals, nursing homes, or have recently been discharged with MRSA.
2. Those who have regular contact with health care workers.
3. Those who have recently taken antibiotics such as flurorquinolone or cephalosporin.
4. The misuse or overuse of antibiotics allows bacteria to evolve and develop resistance to drugs. Antibiotics should be taken only when necessary and patients should take the full course of medication as prescribed by their physician.
5. Scrapes and sores must be kept clean and bandaged until healed – minor cuts and scrapes are the way MRSA takes hold.
6. People who have sores that will not heal or that are filled with pus should see a physician and request a test for staph infection.

How can MRSA be prevented?

Parents, children, and teenagers (particularly athletes) must be instructed as to the following facts:

1. Personal items should not be shared. This includes water bottles and any other containers also brushes, combs, razors, lip balm, towels, makeup, cell phones and musical instruments.
2. Musical instruments, particularly those that are shared, must have a strict and enforceable policy and procedure for cleaning the instruments in place in all schools.
3. Staph grows rapidly in warm, moist environments. Extra vigilance should be exercised in gyms and health clubs.
4. Equipment in gyms should be wiped down using equal parts of bleach and waters.

The very most important preventative measure is always hand washing. Wash hands thoroughly. Have ready access to a hand sanitizer (Purell is an example) in an antibacterial form, either lotion, wipes or liquid.

Are infected cases reportable?

People who are infected are permitted to attend school as long as they are compliant with infection control measures.

At this time the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services does not recommend parent notification for isolated cases. The Wyckoff Board of Health will urge the State of New Jersey public health officials to establish a reporting system that will ensure tracking of risks and a means of epidemiological investigation to reduce spread.

The Bergen County Department of Health Services, the Wyckoff Department of Health and the NJ Department of Education are working closely with all school districts to ensure that appropriate precautions and protocols are in place. Please log-on to the following websites for up to date information on MRSA:

<http://www.bergenhealth.org>
<http://nj.gov/health/cd/mrsa/index.shtml>
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa.html
www.nwbrhc.org
www.wyckoff-nj.com

Students have always been encouraged to bring hand sanitizers to school such as Purell. The schools will continue to work closely with local agencies as appropriate and keep you informed. I hope you find this information helpful.

Sincerely,

Janet Razze, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools